

Sample Exchanges and Components

These are not formal, written responses to questions. These are chunks of information that the leader or teacher of the class or workshop have prepared as responses to questions that have come up in previous sessions. It is the information of each module that is important - not the prose presented in the example.

Sample Comment: "I'll never be able to do Step Four..."

Sample Step Four Module:

When the time comes, when you have really done Steps One, Two, and Three you will be able to do the next step. You might even look forward to it.

There is nothing in Step Four you have not already thought about. The purpose of Step Four is to get them out of your head and onto paper, where they stop moving. When we only tell and retell our story, our version changes just a little every time we tell it.

By writing it all in one place, you see what a big steaming pile your life has become. When you see that pile, you'll be ready to sit down with your sponsor or the person with whom you do Step Five, to have them help you make sense of what is there.

Sample Comment: "I'll never be able to do Step Five..."

Sample Step Five Module:

In Step Five, you get to see your steaming pile in 3D. You need two eyes to see things in 3D, so you need a second viewpoint to see your Fourth Step in three dimensions. The person you're doing Step Five with will have some experience and be able to help you separate the things that come up:

- a) What is yours and what is not? We tend to become the center of the universe (we think) and everything is about "me." We take on responsibility for other people's thoughts or actions, or try to escape our own responsibility by claiming it was really so-and-so, not "me." You may be surprised to see what gets taken out of your Fourth Step, and what remains.
- b) Not everything in your Fourth Step are bad things. The Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve both tell us we must inventory our assets, too. That is not to pat us on the head so we don't feel bad about the bad things that come up. The purpose of identifying assets is to see where we were given gifts or developed good abilities, and usually how we have not used these assets properly, or turned them into a weapon against other people.

c) We hear the person we have chosen for our Fifth Step share his own experience with the issues we are facing and are surprised to find how we have reacted as simple humans, not monsters or saints. We find that we are imperfect, as are the other people in AA, but need to take responsibility for what is ours, discard excess baggage that is not ours to repair, and identify all the aspects of our lives, good and bad.

Sometimes a participant will challenge you with a rumor he has heard about AA? Answer that rumor truthfully; either with the facts and cite your source for your answers, or admit you do not have the answer now and agree to look for the real story behind the rumor.

Sample Rumor: “I heard Bill Wilson used LSD and other drugs.”

Module Response:

Yep. In the 1960s, before Timothy Leary and black light posters, researchers believed LSD would be useful in treating alcoholism and depression, and might be a tool to use in finding the “Spiritual Experience” most AAs were seeking. Bill took LSD under supervision, often with Aldous Huxley (author of “The Doors of Perception”) in California. Lois participated in some of those lab sessions.

The story is in Chapter 23 of Pass It On, which is Bill Wilson’s history of AA. When it became controversial, Bill stopped participating in the experiment. It is also covered in Ernie Kurtz’ unofficial history of AA, “Not God.”

In other sessions, you may have someone who wants to explore some non-recovery related question, or wants to show how smart

they are by asking a question to which they already know the answer, but want to have the chance to be the one to tell the class.

There are different responses to different types of off topic questions.

Sample Question: “Isn’t it true that Bill Wilson was in the Masonic Lodge?”

Module Response:

I really don’t know. It’s never been part of my understanding of how to do the Steps or to deal with my own Recovery. But I’m sure it has been documented if it is true.

Does that change whether you will do your Steps, or the information being presented here? Can we focus on Steps and Recovery?

Sample Question: “Shouldn’t alcoholism simply be classified as a Mental Illness?”

Module Response:

I’m not a medical person and am not qualified to diagnose either medically or psychiatrically. The AMA (American Medical Association) does define alcoholism as a separate diagnosis with mental and physical factors. The mental obsession might be on the level of a mental illness. An alcoholic can have additional problems, such as schizophrenia, neurosis, etc., but that does not change the diagnosis of “alcoholic.”

Would you use the fact the disease is not classified the way you want it to be classified as a reason to not do the Steps? If you think psychiatry would help you more than the Steps, you are free to try that.

I, personally, have done three rounds of psychotherapy and several class/

workshop sessions in sobriety. I found having my AA program in place, and telling the doctor the truth (which was a whole new concept) to be very useful in getting the benefit of a good therapist.

Sometimes the question will be heartfelt and, if you have made the class a safe place to ask real questions, may be instrumental in helping the participant overcome his or her block on doing the work of Recovery.

Sample Question: "I was looking at the prayers and I don't understand all that "thee" and "thine" stuff. What does that mean?"

Module Response:

It would never have occurred to me to ask that question. I was raised in a good, church-going family and “thee” and “thine” were part of the language from the very early days.

Let's take the suggested Third Step prayer Page 63:

"God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

Now, let's do that in current English to get the meaning without the 16th Century English.

"God, I offer myself to You – to build with me and to do with me as You will. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Your will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your Power, Your Love, and Your Way of life. May I do Your will always!"

If you have a more personal way to phrase this prayer, so that it is clear to you and you mean the words, you have an obligation to make this prayer as strong as you can.

From these examples, you can see that the “Modules” are topics that are either thought of in advance, including a short response, with a citation, if appropriate.

Questions for my personal set of modules have come from Meditation, from Reading the Big Book, and other Recovery publications, from the participants of my previous Beginner's Classes, from discussion with others in Recovery over coffee, or from meetings beyond these classes.

Remember, you are not perfect and don't pretend to be. If you are found to be presenting a false front, it will damage your message. Your effort is supposed to be based on Carrying the Message.

We will look at other existing modules in the next section.